

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## WATERFOWL BREEDING GROUNDS UNUSUALLY WET THIS YEAR

Waterfowl breeding grounds in the north-central United States and Canada are the wettest since 1955, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

Recently completed surveys also showed that the waterfowl breeding population in this area is about the same size as last year.

Air and ground surveys of this pothole country, the most important breeding ground for North American game ducks, are conducted annually by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and Ducks Unlimited--a private organization.

Potholes are glacier-formed ponds and lakes which provide ideal duck nesting habitat with the right combination of water and vegetation. Late summer rains in 1973 and one of the heaviest snowfalls in recent winters combined to produce the unusually wet conditions.

The number of pothole ponds have increased by some two million over last year--from 3.5 million in 1973 to 5.5 million this year. Spring rains supplemented the precipitation of last fall and winter, so the large number of ponds should remain wet through the summer production season.

While overall waterfowl populations showed little change there were significant changes in breeding populations of two important species that are highly prized by hunters--mallards were down 14 percent from last year, while pintails were up 38 percent, an unusually large increase.

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No firm estimates on the size of the fall flight will be made until early August, when a second breeding ground survey will be completed and a closer look at actual duck production has been taken. However, at this time an anticipated large early hatch of mallard and pintails has not materialized in certain areas.

Significant changes in the distribution of breeding birds were noted this year. In 1973 many ducks flew to the northern reaches of the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba when water on the prairies was scarce. This year, however, the ducks are concentrated in the southern prairie provinces because of record water levels.

Potholes in North Dakota numbered nearly 120 percent higher than last year and a 35 percent increase in breeding ducks in the state was noted. In South Dakota and Montana the number of breeding ducks declined from last year because of drier conditions in these two states.

On the whole, the 1974 continental duck breeding population of an estimated 39.4 million is close to last year's 39.8 million and in line with the long term average.

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